

Dance on the Lethe

Danse des Morts.

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DANSE DES MORTS,

—OR—

MACABRE DANCE.

DEDICATION.

This Poem was written CERTIS
DE CAUSIS, and is affectionately in-
scribed to my "Dear Cousins," whose
fates are within it decreed.

FORMOSE PUER.

INTRODUCTORY SONNET.

As I walked out one lonesome starlit night,
I had a vision which was not a vision,
And of this walk oft-times I've made derision,
E'en if around me did play many a sprite,
And what I saw, God grant was a great sight,
And what it was, was hard for a decision.
But crashing bones made many a loud collision,
And darting eyes could scarcely trace their flight;
Some rose from out the water, some the ground
Some sailed athwart th' ethereal vault of blue,
Some only made a strangling gurgling sound,
Some roared like distant thunder as they flew;
Some were strange aspects as they passed around,
And some were goblins that I surely knew.

THE FATES,

OR

THE DANCE ON THE LETHE.

My readers may regard me as a very presumptuous man, but I can not help it, and after the *literati* of Crawfordsville, Indiana, away in the misty future, have experienced what I have attempted to describe, they will quietly acquiesce with me, and place a feather in my cap. They may now claim that I am possessed with *his satanic majesty*, or the idiosyncrasy peculiar to a monomaniac, neither can I help that, but Crawfordsville talent is too precious to be wasted, and too popular to be hissed from the stage of public favor, and I would not do one thing intentionally to retard the progress of that noble band of literary aspirants. I only wish to show them that when we meet in the "sweet bye and bye" that I am correct, and when the Lethe disgorges its vast multitude, Crawfordsville will be represented as described. I have caused this to be published, not with malice toward anyone, but guided only by pure motives, and the *muses*. He who has never gazed out upon the dark rolling Lethe of fancy, has never enjoyed the pleasure of a deep and sweet reverie.

Some uncontrollable feeling came over me, and I was permitted to look away over yonder into the future, and behold that contemporary line of poetic writers, that this *Dear Athens* (Crawfordsville) prides herself so much of. When my fancy gazed out upon the waters, it saw millions of fairy aspects, at first they appeared to be mere shadows, phantoms or what not, but I had not gazed long however, till those shadows had grown into human skeletons, and each skeleton carried a wand or banner, with name engraven thereon, as candidate for the rank it thought it merited. I was permitted to see just as the noble representatives of Crawfordsville were receiving their commission for their reward. Among them I noticed, Mayfield, Krout, Thompson and Lew Wallace. Occasionally I would get a glimpse of the Wabash Po—t, Clodfelter, but he did not appear to figure very conspicuously.

I hold that there is but a small space between *heaven* and true poets. They are rare, and like the heavenly dove that flies upon the same exalted level, and never touches the earth:—It is only one time in many millions, that genius arrives with us to live forever. Some few may set eternal stars over our heads, many others may scatter delicious flowers along our pathway, fragrant and beautiful in the morning to wither away in the first noonday sun.

You will perceive in the order of arrangement (which is just as I saw it,) that the judgment is by turns administered, and from the representatives of Crawfordsville, Frank Mayfield will be the first to arise on the waters and appear before the judgment seat of St. Peter.

He will struggle with the tide,
 And the muses by his side,
 Will but place him on the sand,
 With a meter in his hand;
 Then with Harp's *Æolian* note,
 He will row his fairy boat,
 When the softest chords will flow,
 Over those that sleep below;
 There will bony fingers creep
 Then from out the rolling deep,
 And with rattling bones around,
 He will strike a doleful sound,
 And their requiem be will chime,
 In a sort of "Runic Rhyme."
 Ere their sweetest cadence dies,
 All those creaking bones arise,
 In a circle last around,
 Keeping time to ev'ry sound;
 In the midst our minstrel stands,
 Musing there with sweeping hands,
 O'er the Syren Harps he woke,
 And the bones to whom he spoke,
 With many a gurgling splatter,
 And a kind of clitter-clatter,
 Dance the skeletons aright,
 Till the "wee sma' hours o' night,"
 When one of the "Tuneful Nine,"
 Seeing Frank on the decline,
 Gently stepped upon the water;
 Just think that lovely daughter!

There with him dancing by, on the bosom of the Lethe,*
 Where the flow'ry walks are grand, and all beauty seems to
 breathe,

*For rhythm, I pronounce this "Leeth" as a monosyllable and to give my
 "Dear Cousins" a chance for an infliction. "Gods, don't." I hear them say,
 there are plenty of chances for inflictions in this drowsy *cant* produced by
 some poor sickly muse. But never mind and use this also,

There all minstrels gently join, as they mount their Great Pe-
gassus,*

And with winged speed, they flee to the gorgeous Mount Par-
nassus.

Frank, he went up all alone,
To St. Peter on his throne,
Just to hear his fair decision,
E'n if it were derision,
But he was a "boss old boy,"
And he filled Frank's heart with joy;
He didn't believe in aristocracy,
And abhorred all Pantisocracy,
But Frank made a jerking bow,
To his angelship, just how,
I do not mind, but know,
It was ten degrees or so;
When St. Peter said, "begin,
Tell the truth if you would win.
An eternal place, and name,
On the mountain top of fame,
So Mayfield I pray be out,
And tell all you wrote about,
"Well, says Frank, if I must say,
I once wrote a little lay,
But the subject I can't give,
Just now, yet, it will live,
For I wrote it all the same,
"On the border line of fame."†
Then the cherubs all around,
Made their golden trumpets sound,

*My Dear Cousins please pardon this, you can throw the accent on the first syllable if you desire.

†Frank Mayfield in the Indianapolis Herald, Jan., 1880.

"I stand where poets all have stood,
Just on the border line of fame."

Ah! Frank did you finally get there?

With a kind of laugh and riot,
 That the St. could hardly quiet;
 'Is that, sir, all you wrote?'
 'No,' piped Frank's husky throat,
 'But if I can now rely,
 On my memory I'll try,
 I wrote "No Irish need apply."*
 St. Peter jumped in haste,
 Crack'd his heels and backward paced,
 Well done my boy, well done,
 You are a fav'rite son,
 Pass on awhile and wait,
 Thro' that little golden gate,
 And you soon shall know your fate,
 Frank, he passed as if he'd sinned,
 While St. Peter only grinned,
 Clapped his hands upon his side,
 And in thunder tones he cried,
 There's a poet true and tried.
 On the towering mountain high,
 Basking in the sunny sky,
 Sits our hero.†

But arise!
 Cries a seraph from the skies,
 And then in a moment rears,
 A bleached form that's been for years,
 In the depths with the forsaken,
 Till some cherub form hath taken,
 Off the veil, and who is he!
 The alabaster form that we see;

*Frank Mayfield in Crawfordsville Journal. This certainly rivaled his celebrated paw paw poem. Yet Frank can make "jam up" poetry out of paw paws,

†Frank feels good, he is now enjoying the acme of his fame, and looks down upon his contemporaries with contempt. He has tasted of the clear draught of immortal fame, and likes the potion. No one can enjoy this more than my Dear Cousin Frank.

Then with a gentle clatter,
 And a "splitter, splatter splatter,"
 Dance the fairies jigs and reels,
 And there in the center wheels,
 Maurice Thompson with his lyre,
 There amid the bony choir;
 Independent never "carin."
 If he did kill the white heron,*
 And it made him thus immortal,
 His muse they can not startle,
 But with a huge grimace,
 And a white, and bony face,
 He struck his sweetest notes,
 And the fairies in their boats,
 When they could not stand no more,
 With their gently dipping oar,
 Rowed our Maurice to the shore;
 His Pegassus he strode,
 And in flying speed he rode,
 To the monarch of the mountains,
 And the pure inspiring fountains,
 There he enters thro' the gate,
 To his holy high estate,
 Muttering some perfect meter,
 As he first meets old St. Peter.†
 "Welcome Maurice, welcome to thee!"
 Cries St. Peter in a great glee,
 "Come up to the judgment seat,
 And your busy life repeat!"
 "Well my judge, my life was busy,
 (But my head's a little dizzy,)
 Tho' I wrote but in prosaics,

*See his *Witchery of Archery*, "The Death of the White Heron."

†The meeting of Cousin Maurice and St. Peter, will be long remembered, although Maurice seemed to be somewhat embarrassed owing to the peculiar rattle of his bones, yet he behaved wonderfully nice.

All the Hoosierdom Mosaics.*
 And 'tis strange the works which shame us,
 Very often make us famous;"
 "But no time now for debating,
 Many more outside are waiting,
 And we want no pompous diction,
 Cries St. Peter, nor no fiction!"
 "Well, dear Sir, I wrote some "Witchery,"
 And some "Archery" and some "Whichery,"
 And much more I wrote for Harper,
 But perhaps for Scribner, sharper,
 And let me tell you no disaster,
 Come from any poetaster,
 That my muse e'er brought to birth,
 Which I think proves well my worth;"
 Peter could sit still no longer,
 Rose and said, but "few write stronger,
 Just step thro' that golden gate,
 And there be content to wait,
 Till archangels fix your fate."†
 He then passed the golden portal,
 Where he hoped to be immortal,
 Then his jaded horse he spurred,
 And his eyes they blinked and blurred,
 As his ears they overheard,
 Frank Mayfield's tuneful lyre,
 And his mountain reed up higher;
 Then he goes up to the throne,
 Where Frank sitteth all alone,
 With a whoop he tries to pass,
 But alas! alas! alas!

*See his Hoosier Mosaics.

†Maurice felt good, and indeed would have been happy had it not been for the obstruction thrown in his path just through the little gate.

For a struggle there ensues for high rank.*
 Leaping back with a mere shiver,
 As he draws out from his quiver,
 The fatal shaft, and from his bow,
 Comes a twang, and down below,
 He "plumps" poor Frank.
 There to Maurice on his throne,
 Harps on Houri,† all alone,
 And no ears e're drank such strains, as she
 sweeps the golden strings,
 Calling cherubs here and there, with her golden
 rustling wings,

Poor Mayfield after being "plumped" off of the mountain (what a pity it was, that he was not an archer too) becoming envious and jealous of his contemporary, ran zigzag along a mighty tairn, when a cherubs sword arose from the mere, seizing it with giant grip wheeled and threw it. The pointed silver flashed splendor through the Moon's silvery sheen, as on it went headlong, perpendicular, whirling in an arch around with fatal vengeance to anything with which it might come in contact. Sweeping and cropping shrubs as if hurled by some Titan of old. On, on it goes vengeance like, directed with impetuous speed toward the vital spark sur-

*This was a long and severe struggle for the mastery, at times it was hard to determine which would have to yield, but Maurice, having an archers experience, finally took advantage of his wiry antagonist and hurled him down the awful abyss, pierced thro' and thro' by his certain arrow and poor Cousin Mayfield's fame was not a fixed certainty.

†Maurice Thompson may congratulate himself for the prospective pleasure of living in sweet communion with that black-eyed Nymph of Paradise; and now my Dear Cousin let new vanities swell in your bosom. Only a little lapse of 1000 years now separate you.

rounded by the bony form of Maurice, but ere it had reached its wonderful destination, a sturdy cherub seeing the fatal mark of its intended terminus, leaped like a meteor into its well directed route, seizing it by the hilt, brandished it twice over his head at each time crying vengeance on him who hurled this implement of war, then raising it in a semicircle obliquely, let fly the silvery weapon from whence it had proceeded. On, on, it goes leaving a trace of fire behind it, as if hurled by the hand of Juno, till alas, poor Mayfield it struck about midriff, knocking him into the casket of oblivion, where he may take his calm repose forever, and naught but mortal dare intrude. When the bony forms of the Lethe arise, and on goes the dance.

From beneath the sullen water,
 Rose a fair and lovely daughter,
 And there in a circle 'round,
 Many legions doth abound,
 From the bosom of the Lethe,*
 Many fairies show'd their teeth.
 Terpsichore upon the sand,
 Gave the rattling bones command,
 Hornpipes, jigs and reels were spun.
 And many slow cotillions run,
 Legions from the river reared,
 Myriads in it disappeared.
 Then two gentle forms arose,
 As if from a long repose,
 And no ears e'er drank such chimes,
 ("Ceptin" those who've heard their rhymes,)
 As they struck upon the wires,

*Tautology! tautology!! Please cry it aloud.
 And bring as you cry it my faint muse's shroud.

Of their well attuned lyres,
 But as spirits now adore us,
 We'll proceed to sing the chorus,
 Roared the River clashed the bones,
 Chimed the Harps and crashed the tones,
 Every sound was in its place,
 Ev'ry fairy moved with grace,
 Not a discord broke the spell,
 All was music in the dell,
 Some would wake, and some would sleep,
 Some would dance, and some would weep,
 Some would laugh, and some would cry,
 Some would heave, and some would sigh,
 Roared the River burst the tones,
 Beat the water with their bones,
 Every crash and gentle chime,
 Was within its proper time:
 Till one of the "Nine,"
 Came down from above,
 In her plumage so fine,
 And her spirit of love,
 She gazed as they danced,
 With devotional care,
 And her soul was entranced,
 O'er the musical air,
 And she magic'ly rowed,
 From the billowy strand.
 To the one that she loved,*
 With a harp in her hand,

*"Beautiful Venus! with thy hair of light,
 And dazzling eyes of glory; in whose form
 The charm of earth's least mortal daughters grow,
 To an unearthly stature; in an essence of pure elements,
 While the hues of youth carnationed like a sleeping infant's
 cheek
 Rocked by the beatings of a mother's heart, etc., etc.,
 Or the rose tints, etc., etc.,"

My Dear Cousin Mary how vividly I thought of these lines when I saw
 fair Venus pilot you up to the temple of fame.

And I gazed thro' the night,
At the dance on the wave,
As the pale melting light,
Lit the lone empty grave,
With the wings of the wind.
They arose from the Lethe.
Leaving cherubs behind,
In an ambient wreath.

And as fair Venus balanced herself upon the silvery waters by the side of the author of "Little Brown Hands" to direct her to the mountain of fame—down beneath the bubbling waves in a great circumambient wreath sank the fairies, and on the swift wings of the blast go the two, Mary Hannah Krout, and Venus, thro' infinite vistas of space, from the flowery bosom of the Lethe to the great mountain of Parnassus. The way up the rugged mountain was as pleasant as pageantry could make it. The rocks were all covered with the fairest tapestry. Hundreds of fairy barks floated gallantly upon the Lethe, with their banners shining splendor, and glassing themselves in the silvery waters. Her pathway along the fair valleys were strewn with delicious flowers, by the hand of cherubs, till the whole mountain seemed bathed in their fragrance. On, on, they go up the towering mountain, directed by the sweet and gentle cadence of Maurice's heavenly lyre, till the whole atmosphere seemed flavored with its undying vibrations. They go on and on, unnoticed till

they come within a cubit of his golden throne—an instant more, and all is still, but on looking above they behold him gazing down on them with one of those grins peculiar to cherubs of his rank, and in a fit of dissatisfaction they hear his bugle blow which rallies dreadful cherubim to ranks of war, but on gazing down the second time and beholding the legions hastening to the aid of the author of "Little Brown Hands." he disperses his army and shrinks into a dark and dreary cave content to let Mary Hannah occupy a higher position upon the mountain than himself. So on she goes unmolested—She comes to a table-land paved with gold where all the rocks were disguised by some extrinsic attributes of fancy's dress, and drapery decked with diamonds and crystals were hanging from the mighty gorges of the mountain as if suspended by the hands of angels, for the passage of divine footsteps. There upon her throne sits she musing with the divine messengers of heaven, calling them around her in shoals, by the heavenly strains of her undying lyre.

When a voice cried, arise !*
 And peeped many hollow eyes,
 From beneath the rolling wave,
 Which so long had been a grave.
 Then they all began to dance,
 O'er the River's broad expanse,
 And their gnashing teeth would clatter,
 To the tune of "chitter chatter,"

*Just who this was giving command I cannot exactly say but it appeared to be flavored with the usual egotism of —— but never mind, the cadence of that voice was divine.

As they run the graceful Schottische,
 It appeared a little Scottish,
 As they round and round did canter,
 It made me think of "Tam O Shanter,"
 Yawning grave yards belched their bones,*
 "Ceptin" those that turned to stones,
 Coffins rose from out the ground,
 To the clitter clatter sound,
 Death robes floated in the air,
 With relics from the golden stair,
 Coffins stood upon the end,
 Skeletons looked out and grinned;
 Reader, shrink from such a feature,
 If you are a scary creature,
 For it certainly is awful,
 And I'm sure it's hardly lawful,
 To thus sing of such a sight,
 Yet I can but think it right,
 For some poor ungodly sinner,
 May expect to be the winner,
 Like Clodtelter,† who will try,
 To pass contemporaries by,
 And he'll give his talent scope,
 When he's not an earthly hope;
 But as I have been inspired,
 It is your time to be lyred,
 By the harp with golden strings,
 Cherubs touch with magic wings;
 I'm aware that some may prank me,
 But I trust, that more will thank me,
 For all this advice I've given,

*I am indeed anxious that my readers shall understand this. I believe in close descriptions of such scenes. It was a scary sight indeed, just imagine, what bravery it took to stand and behold such a scene—I done so — Ego!

†Gods! what a name to rhyme on, 'Tis hard to tell which would bring more credit his verse or name.

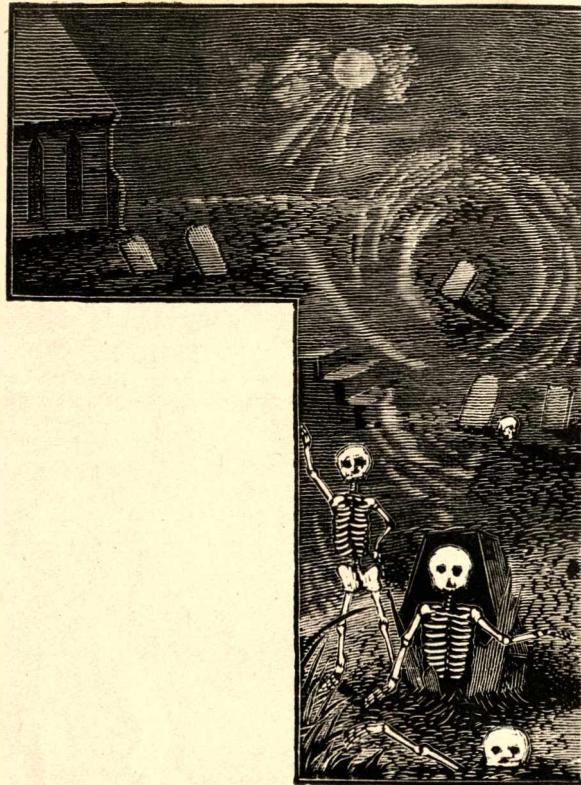
That has just come fresh from heaven;
 I don't believe in rapping spirit,
 If I'd hear one I would fear it.
 If I'd see one I would doubt it,
 If I'd feel one I would rout it.

All things favorable before us
 We will now begin the chorus.

'Roared the River clashed the bones,*
 Came the drowning, gurgling tones,
 Clenching hands and bowing neat,
 Tiptoe shottische thou art sweet,
 Shake the hands and place the feet,
 Graceful on this silvery sheet;
 Promenade and circle round,
 Go till Gabriel's trumpet sound.
 Dance on tiptoe, thou art grand,
 As you shake each bony hand,
 Irish jig and rigadoon,
 Time to each imperial tune,
 'Round they go in dizzy maze,
 Twinkling feet so gently plays,
 To Bolero reel or waltz,
 Till alas! each fairy halts.

Then a calm spread o'er the River,
 All except a little quiver,
 When a bony cherub rose,
 From its long and sweet repose.
 All eye sockets could but blur,
 At the author of B— H,—
 When he 'rose for his reward.
 SOLDIER, SCHOLAR, NOVELIST, BARD.
 All the judges in a row,
 Tried more honors to bestow,

*This was one of the most graceful dances it was my good [or bad] fortune to see. The "crack" of each bone was as clear as the ring of fresh coined silver.



Coffins rose from out the ground
To the clitter clatter sound,
Death robes floated in the air
With relies from the golden stair;
Coffins stood upon the end,
Skeletons looked out and grin'd.

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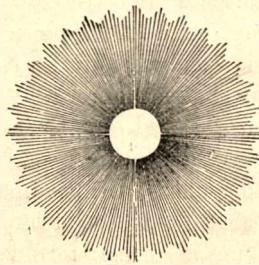
As they knew not where to place him,
 Lest their judgment might disgrace him,
 Some one said by Victor Hugo,
 Others argued not to do so,
 But beside his favorite Irving,
 Was the place of his deserving.
 Then they placed him on Pegassus.*
 With command to sweep Parnassus,
 Of all Crawfordsville small folk,
 That on earth could only croak,
 Such as Thompson, Mayfield, Krout,
 Leaving little "Cloddy" out.†
 From the worthy of the fold,
 By himself, so chill and cold.

The General's reception was a grand affair, for he had no more than dismounted, when thousands of cherubs appropriately equipped came in cavalcades superb, in unbroken lines of splendor, distinguished by those insignia of the Great General's favor, holding in each hand a mace of gold, and striving to attract the attention of the distinguished comer. Around the curve wheels a golden chariot drawn by snow white palfreys embroidered in beautiful gold trappings. The chariot was as famous as it was beautiful, for it had drawn up this gorgeous mountain the immortelles from the early existence of the world, and in it were seated, Hugo, Scott, and Irving. When he entered this rare chariot, they advanced and placed about him, an endless wreath of evergreens, beaded with rare diamonds, as a welcome, and emblematic of his eternal fame. On, on, they go up the steep mountain, till they pass the her-

*"Little Cloddy" Ha! Ha!! Ha!!!

†Excuse me my Dear Cousins.

mit home of Maurice, who comes out to greet his old comrade and contemporary, but ere he had approached two paces toward him, the gulf of oblivion draws in, and swallows him up, and alas! and alas! poor Maurice is no more, and so passeth Mary Hannah Krout, and the world is the same as if they had never lived in it. Pity, Thompson, Krout and Mayfield, for all their efforts were fruitless, and Clodfelter, the most pitiful aspect of the fold, only arrives at the mere of the mountain to have fingers pointed at him, when he slinks back to his *natural* place of abode content to go down with the plebian of the world, and thus we learn that in the final ending of all things, only one from Crawfordsville is to eternally represent her, and that is the author of B.—H.—which is as eternal as the spirit that wrote it.



E P I T A P H .

Gaze on this spot of sorrow, gaze again
Behold the sleeping dust that still remain
The spoils of time, and plant the steeping tear,
Above the mortal relique lying here.
They done their best, 'twas all we could expect,
They sought what nature never did direct,
And courted all the muses for the strain,
They longed to sing, but always sung in vain,
They were so much like Pope (except in name,)
'They gasped for numbers, but no numbers came;
They were the friends of vain ambition—still
And poured forth strains obedient to their will;—
Tho' like the pond that sleeps low in the vale,
Unmoved except by some mere passing gale,
It soon grows slimy and returns to vapor,
Like thoughts they left upon much wasted paper;
This dust is theirs, think kindly as you pass,
For it must rest an unforgotten mass;—
But yet we'll harp their praises as they rest'
What more could we expect—they done their best.

Emeline Fairbanks Mem. Lib.